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John Kerlin  
Executive Director  
Delta Vision Stakeholder Coordination Group  
650 Capitol Mall  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Executive Director Kerlin,

I would like to take this opportunity to comment on the Preliminary Recommendations Report prepared for the Delta Blue Ribbon Task Force, August 21, 2007. Overall, I find the report far ranging and visionary. Congratulations! My comments are intended to fill a few gaps that I think might be missing, areas that need additional emphasis, or some words of caution. The points that I wish to convey include the following:

The discussion regarding the northwest Sacramento River tributaries - Elk, Steamboat and Sutter Sloughs - is excellent. But there appears to be some important areas omitted from this concept. For example, Miner Slough branches off from Sutter and empties into Cache Slough. There already is good habitat along this stretch that needs protection and enhancement. Several locations along these habitat corridors would provide additional habitat oases. Miner Slough passes alongside Prospect Island, which now flooded, would add about 1200 acres of habitat already in public ownership. The tip of Grand Island (200 acres plus) is in public ownership and might provide valuable flooded habitat at the appropriate elevation for endangered fish species. Finally, an area between the J-Mack Ferry and Rio Vista contains elevations at or above sea level; this also should be considered.

I was heartened to find considerable mention of "green" levees, especially for Steamboat and Sutter Sloughs. A recent conference hosted by SAFCA concluded that the presence of certain kinds of vegetation can add considerably to levee stability. Current management practices along these sloughs are not only destructive to habitat values fostered by your report but also put our islands at increased risk of flooding. Your leadership in this area would be greatly appreciated.

The possible use of the Sacramento Ship Canal for habitat has not been considered. There are opportunities for enhancing the shoreline of this otherwise commercial artery. Furthermore, some sloughs, such as Babel, may have connected historically to the upper Liberty Island area through the modern day Ship Channel. Could this connection be remade? One idea that has been floated is the use of the Sacramento Ship Channel as an additional habitat corridor, from Sacramento, to the mouth of Cache Slough?

Cache Slough has been suggested for habitat improvement...does this also include nearby Lindsey Slough? Liberty Island should be included in the restoration efforts. Filling in some part of Liberty, perhaps through excavations from Yolo By-Pass, might serve to stabilize the lower portions.

The protection of Delta's in-channel islands has not been addressed. Though comprising a relatively small area, they contain just about the only remnant patches of original Delta habitat. Some areas should be protected outright. Moreover, the use of the South Fork of the Mokelumne River and Middle River of the San Joaquin as a conveyance system might impair this habitat. The comparative lack of habitat along the North Fork of the Mokelumne River, compared to the South Fork, has been attributed (by some locals) to construction of the Delta Cross Channel and consequence of the North Fork Mokelumne being used as a conveyance facility.

As a matter of clarification, how has the SCG interpreted the PPIC report regarding salt in the Delta? Since the Delta evolved into its historical ecological conditions as a freshwater marsh (at least compared to the more brackish Suisun Marsh), too much salt may impair certain species not accustomed to these conditions. Is this an experiment that will be done?

Despite a considerable amount of restoration work on Georgiana Slough, this new report de-emphasizes this waterway as habitat for fish. Yet it has some of the best riparian corridor habitat in the Delta. Is there not other wildlife values that should be considered?

Habitat development, as well as many of the actions being considered in the report, should go hand-in-hand with nature appreciation, eco- and agritourism, and general economic development in the Delta. Political support, including that of a local nature, generally develops when people can enjoy the resources and/or benefit economically from proposed actions. While some mention has been made in support of recreation and economic development, this connection needs to be stated with more emphasis. More specific comments might address why has trail development been proposed for the eastern Delta uplands, and recreation in general along Hwys 160 and 12 and along the North Delta Waterways, and in legacy towns (all good) but why not other areas as well.

Thanks for this great first start!

Sincerely yours,

*Jeff Hart*

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